

Falls and Parkinson's

This information looks at some of the reasons why people with Parkinson's might fall. It gives helpful tips on what you can do to prevent falls and explains which professionals can offer you support.

What might cause me to fall if I have Parkinson's?

Loss of balance and falling affects many people with Parkinson's and the problem tends to increase over time. But everyone's experience of Parkinson's is different, so you may not have these difficulties.

If you have Parkinson's, you might fall because of:

- poor balance
- taking steps that are too small or that vary in size
- your arms not swinging when you walk
- involuntary movements (dyskinesia), which are a side effect of some Parkinson's medication.

Other reasons you might fall include:

Freezing

Some people with Parkinson's fall because they have problems starting to move or they 'freeze' while they are moving. Freezing is when you stop suddenly, and it can last for a few seconds or minutes.

If this happens, you may feel as though your feet are stuck to the floor or you're unable to move easily, which can make you feel unsteady. This can increase your risk of falling. If you have difficulty with your medication wearing off before your next dose is due, you may find freezing becomes worse.

Speak to your specialist or Parkinson's nurse as they may be able to adjust your medication.

Find out more: [see our information on freezing and Parkinson's.](#)

Posture

As Parkinson's progresses, your posture can change. You might become more stooped and your muscles may become more rigid. Having muscles that are less flexible can increase your risk of falling, as it's more difficult for your body to move and for you to protect yourself if you do lose your balance.

General muscle weakness

You may be much less active than you used to be if you have Parkinson's. This can cause muscles to become weaker and increase your risk of falling. Staying active can help muscles and joints from getting stiff and rigid.

Problems with blood pressure

Problems with blood pressure can affect people generally as they get older, but some Parkinson's medication can cause side effects, including problems with blood pressure. This can lead to dizziness and falls. If you've felt dizzy, or fallen because of dizziness, ask your GP or practice nurse to check your blood pressure both when you're sitting and standing, to see if it's too low.

Drugs used to treat other medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, can potentially make dizziness worse, especially if you are losing weight or not eating and drinking as well as you used to.

Postural hypotension is a sudden drop in blood pressure when changing position, for example getting up out of a chair. It can make you feel very light-headed, which will affect your balance. You may experience postural hypotension as a symptom of Parkinson's. But it can also be caused by the drugs used to treat Parkinson's.

You can avoid some dizzy spells by taking your time. For example, before you get out of bed, sit with your feet touching the floor for a few minutes to get your blood flowing. Then stand up slowly, but try not to walk away immediately – stand for a while until you feel steady.

Find out more: [see our information on low blood pressure and Parkinson's.](#)

Eye problems

Some people with Parkinson's experience problems with their eyes. Difficulty moving your eyes and side effects of some Parkinson's drugs (including anticholinergics) can cause blurred vision. If you're unable to see hazards clearly, this may make you more likely to fall.

You may also have difficulty judging the space around you or not be able to accurately assess the distance between objects. This means you might experience problems finding your way when walking past objects or through a narrow space. Bifocal glasses may also affect how well you judge distance.

Find out more: [see our information on eyes and Parkinson's.](#)

Reducing the risk of falling

It's important to get help and advice about how to avoid falls. Even if you've never fallen before, anxiety or fear of falling can increase the chance of it happening.

There are lots of ways to reduce your risk of falling. Below are ideas that physiotherapists and occupational therapists have suggested to help with balance problems.

Your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse can also give you advice on how to avoid future accidents, or refer you to a physiotherapist or occupational therapist (see the 'Professionals who can help' section for more information).

Get into a rhythm when you walk

Try counting each step, marching on the spot, stepping over patterns on the floor, humming or singing to yourself. You could repeat a word or phrase such as 'walk tall' or 'stride out' to help you stay focused when walking.

Move to the beat

Walking to the tick of a metronome can help you maintain a rhythm, or help you restart walking if you freeze. A metronome is a device that produces a regular tick or beat that musicians use

to keep to a rhythm. They are available from musical instrument shops or online.

Focus on taking longer strides and swinging your arms

Taking bigger steps will help to increase your arm swing. Gently swinging both arms will help you keep your balance when you walk.

Shift your weight

Move your weight from one foot to the other or try to step backwards before moving forwards. If you freeze, you may be able to re-start moving by rocking gently from side to side.

Ask a friend to help

If you're out with a friend and you freeze, they can help you by holding your arm and supporting your balance while you concentrate on moving again.

Avoid distractions

Try to concentrate and keep distractions to a minimum – avoid walking and talking at the same time. If you want to have a conversation, pause and touch something solid, such as a lamp post, when you want to talk. If you cross a busy area plan your route in short stages so that you're not having to concentrate on too much in one go.

Slow down turns

If you need to change direction, try not to turn too quickly or pivot on the spot. It's better to slow down and take a few extra steps to walk around in a half circle. Try to imagine your feet are following the numbers on the face of a clock. Take your time.

Parkinson's medication

How well your symptoms respond to medication can affect your risk of falling. For example, you may freeze suddenly or unpredictably when your medication starts to wear 'off' (when your medication is not working so well) and this can cause falls. So any changes your specialist or Parkinson's nurse makes to your medication to reduce freezing may also help to reduce falls.

Sometimes, Parkinson's may cause people to walk very fast, as if they are running. This can also cause them to fall.

If your drugs don't seem to work as well as they used to, or you think you're falling due to side effects of the drugs you're taking, speak to your specialist or Parkinson's nurse about making changes to your medication.

If you experience dizzy spells, which may make you more likely to fall, make sure you're taking your medication as prescribed.

Hazards in and around your home

There are many things in the home that could make you more likely to fall, including slippery floors, loose carpets and general clutter. Here are some tips on how to reduce hazards in the home:

- Try to clear away as much clutter as you can and arrange your furniture so that moving around is as easy as possible.
- Hand or grab rails can be useful in tight spaces, such as in toilets, bathrooms or by the stairs. Putting non-slip mats in the bathroom will also help.
- Make sure your house is well lit.
- Apply strips of coloured tape to the edge of steps to make them more visible and help prompt you to lift your feet.
- Floor coverings can sometimes be a hazard. For example, carpet patterns can be visually confusing. Speak to an occupational therapist or physiotherapist about applying strips of tape or plastic footsteps on the carpet. These can guide you in places you might be more likely to fall, such as a tricky turn on stairs, or in doorways.
- Keep commonly used items close to hand or stored in a cupboard within easy reach, so you don't need to bend down or stretch too far to get them.
- Make sure you have contact numbers nearby in case of an emergency. Keep a mobile phone with you, or change your landline telephone to a cordless model so that you can carry it with you, in case you fall and need to call for help.
- Try not to rush, even if the phone's ringing or there's someone at the door.
- If you're prone to falls, you might find a community alarm system really helpful. This involves wearing a small device that has a button to alert an

emergency response centre, who will send someone to help you. Your local social services, social work department or health and social care trust can give you details of local schemes. There is usually a small cost for this service.

Other ways to reduce the risk of falling

Exercise

The more fit and active you are, the better your body is able to respond to the demands placed on it, making you less likely to fall and injure yourself. In some areas of the UK, you can be referred for a fitness review through the Exercise Referral Scheme. After the review, a fitness instructor can tailor a programme to your individual needs. Your GP may be able to tell you about schemes available in your area and refer you.

The Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI) supports leisure centres to provide an accessible environment for everyone, including providing adapted equipment for disabled people. You can find your nearest IFI centre here, www.activityalliance.org.uk/get-active

Find out more: see our information on exercise and Parkinson's.

Equipment and walking aids

You might find that equipment can help you to walk, such as a walking stick or a rollator (a frame with wheels).

Before you start using a walking aid, it's very important to get advice from a physiotherapist. Some walking aids aren't recommended for people with Parkinson's as they can affect your walking pattern and make you more likely to fall. But, the correct walking aid can increase your confidence and help you to lift your feet better.

Footwear

You might find shoes with low heels or flat soles are easier to walk in. Try to avoid unsupportive shoes, such as floppy slippers. An occupational therapist or physiotherapist can give you advice about what shoes to wear and ways of making the places where you walk easier and safer to manage.

Professionals who can help

If you're experiencing falls, make an appointment with your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse to talk about what can be done to improve your safety and balance. The following professionals can also help:

Physiotherapists

A physiotherapist can help you improve your confidence and reduce any fear of falling. They can also teach you techniques to help you get down safely on to the floor, and up again if you fall. Often, a physiotherapist will work with an occupational therapist to help you remove any tripping hazards from your home.

Ask your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse about a referral for physiotherapy as soon as possible after your diagnosis. In some areas, you can refer yourself at the local hospital or a community health centre, depending on the type of service available.

You can also self-refer to a private physiotherapist, which you will need to pay for. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy can help you find a private physiotherapist. You can find their contact details in the 'More information and support' section.

Some Parkinson's UK local groups have sessions led by a physiotherapist – check with your local group for details. Call our helpline on **0808 800 0303** or see our website parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups to find your local group.

Find out more: see our information on physiotherapy and Parkinson's.

Occupational therapists

An occupational therapist can suggest strategies to help you reduce the risk of falls. They might ask you to keep a falls diary to identify when, where and how you fall. They can also recommend equipment that can help reduce the risk of falling, or help you get up if you do fall.

You can usually contact an occupational therapist through your GP, your social services or social work department, or health and social care trust. You can also ask your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse to refer you to a rehabilitation unit if you need to see

other professionals too, such as a physiotherapist or speech and language therapist.

You can also pay for private occupational therapy. To find a private occupational therapist in your area, you can contact the Royal College of Occupational Therapists. See the 'More information and section' for their contact details.

Find out more: see our [information on occupational therapy and Parkinson's](#).

More information and support

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

020 7306 6666

www.csp.org.uk

Royal College of Occupational Therapy

020 3141 4600

hello@rct.co.uk

www.rcot.co.uk

Parkinson's nurses

Parkinson's nurses provide expert advice and support to people with Parkinson's and those who care for them. They can also make contact with other health and social care professionals to make sure your needs are met.

The role of the Parkinson's nurse varies. Each will offer different services, aiming to meet local needs. Some nurses are based in the community, whereas others are based in hospital settings.

Many Parkinson's nurses are independent prescribers. This means they can prescribe and make adjustments to medication, so someone with Parkinson's doesn't always need to see their specialist for changes to or queries about their Parkinson's drugs.

Parkinson's nurses may not be available in every area, but your GP or specialist can give you more details on local services.

You can find out more at parkinsons.org.uk/nurses

Information and support from Parkinson's UK

You can call our free confidential helpline for general support and information. Call **0808 800 0303** (calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks) or email hello@parkinsons.org.uk

Our helpline can also put you in touch with one of our Parkinson's local advisers, who give one-to-one information and support to anyone affected by Parkinson's. They can also provide links to local groups and services.

Our website parkinsons.org.uk has a lot of information about Parkinson's and everyday life with the condition. You can also find details of your local support team and your nearest local group meeting at parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou

You can also visit parkinsons.org.uk/forum to speak with other people in a similar situation on our online discussion forum.

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who contributed to, or reviewed this information, including experts and people affected by Parkinson's.

Can you help?

At Parkinson's UK, we are totally dependent on donations from individuals and organisations to fund the work that we do. There are many ways that you can help us to support people with Parkinson's.

If you would like to get involved, please contact our Supporter Services team on **0800 138 6593** or visit our website at **parkinsons.org.uk/donate**. Thank you.

Our information

All of our most up-to-date information is available at **parkinsons.org.uk/information-support**. If you'd prefer to read one of our printed leaflets or booklets, find out how to place an order at **parkinsons.org.uk/ordering-resources** or by calling **0300 123 3689**.

We make every effort to ensure that our services provide current, unbiased and accurate information. We hope that this will add to any professional advice you receive and help you to make any decisions you may face. Please do continue to talk to your health and social care team if you are worried about any aspect of living with Parkinson's.

If you'd like to find out more about how we put our information together, including references and the sources of evidence we use, please contact us at **publications@parkinsons.org.uk**



Falls and Parkinson's (PKFS39/2020)

Do you have any feedback about this information? Your comments will help us ensure our resources are as useful and easy to understand as possible. Please return to **Information Content team, Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ**, or email **publications@parkinsons.org.uk**. Thank you!

1. Please choose the option that best fits you.

- I have Parkinson's and was diagnosed in I care for someone with Parkinson's
 I have a friend or family member with Parkinson's I'm a professional working with people with Parkinson's
 Other (please specify)

2. Where did you get this information from?

- GP Specialist Parkinson's nurse Parkinson's UK local group Parkinson's UK local adviser
 Ordered directly from us Call to the helpline
 Other (please specify)

3. Has it answered all your questions?

- Yes, completely Yes, mostly Not sure Partly Not at all

4. How easy was it to understand?

- Very easy Easy Not sure Quite difficult Very difficult

We're the Parkinson's charity that drives better care, treatments and quality of life.

Together we can bring forward the day when no one fears Parkinson's.

Parkinson's UK
215 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London SW1V 1EJ

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**
(Monday to Friday 9am–7pm, Saturday 10am–2pm).

Interpreting available.

NGT Relay **18001 0808 800 0303**

(for use with smart phones, tablets, PCs and other devices). For more information see www.ngts.org.uk

hello@parkinsons.org.uk

parkinsons.org.uk

Order code: PKFS39

Last updated March 2020. We review all our information within three years. Please check our website for the most up to date versions of all our information.

©Parkinson's UK. Parkinson's UK is the operating name of the Parkinson's Disease Society of the United Kingdom. A charity registered in England and Wales (258197) and in Scotland (SC037554).



5. Has it helped you manage your condition better, or make choices that have improved your life in some way?

It helped a lot It helped a little No change It didn't help It made things worse

6. What is your ethnic background?*

Asian or Asian British Black or Black British Chinese Mixed White British White other
 Other (please specify)

*We ask about your ethnicity to ensure our information is reaching a broad range of people. However, this question is optional.

Want to hear more from us?

I would like a response to my feedback I would like to be a member of Parkinson's UK
 I'm interested in joining the Information review group, to offer feedback on Parkinson's UK information

If you've answered yes to any of these options, please complete your details below.

Name

Address

Email

Telephone

How would you prefer us to contact you? Email Post Phone

We will not pass on your details to any other organisation or third party. To find out more, read our privacy policy at parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions